

March 14, 2009

Dear Committee Members:

I am parent of three wonderful children. My seven year old son was diagnosed with autism at age three. Jack, like other autistic children suffers from a variety of problems. He is significantly delayed developmentally and he has severe OCD that causes him a huge amount of anxiety. His early years were particularly difficult because he had almost no language.

I consider my family lucky because our Birth to 3 providers gave us a lot of information that helped put Jack on the right track with speech and occupational therapy. During this time we focused on researching and trying different therapies with our son. Some of which were provided by Birth to 3, and some we paid for out of pocket. Jack's doctors told us that, Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), had the best proven results as a treatment for autism. We also learned the younger the child and the greater the number of hours, the quicker the child made advancements.

At age three, our school system was responsible for Jack's education. Our out of pocket costs for his therapies had already put us into serious debt. The town put Jack into a Special Needs integrated preschool class. During a PPT, I asked about using ABA but, I was told there wasn't any programming of that type available. The neurologist and psychologist we consulted felt he needed a certified behavior analyst to oversee his program to help him succeed in the classroom setting.

The special ed teacher did not have training in this area but she did her best to try and put something together for an hour or so a week. Week after week, I heard the same things from the speech pathologists and paras, "It's hard to teach him because it's hard to get him to engage." As parents, the time he was at our town preschool was particularly tough for my husband and I. Jack was actually losing language and eye contact. As I watched his twin sister beginning to grow and understand the world around her in new ways, her brother was losing crucial time of brain development.

With three young children and finances tight, we asked the town to provide an appropriate program. Ultimately, we ended up agreeing to outplace my son in an "ABA" based school. It was difficult decision to put a 4.5 year old in a car with someone I didn't know and let them drive him 15 miles on the highway to get to school. He would be leaving his sister and typical peers but we knew he needed to be taught by people who understood how to get through to him.

Jack is now a 7 year old who is flourishing because of the ABA program he attends. He talks all day long and is learning new things every day. His programming is skillfully monitored by Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs). Three years ago I feared that he would never be potty trained let alone do the things he can do now because of the barriers that were preventing him from expressing himself and opening himself up to learning. Not only is he learning to read and write but he can ride a bike and tie his shoes. Most importantly, Jack's BCBA's have taught my family to how to be successful at understanding him and his behaviors to ease our burden and also be supportive to him.

I am very much in support of bill 6666, section 7. I know that if our town had a certified behavior analyst available for my son and the many other autistic children in our town, their lives and the lives of their families would all be improved in many ways.

Thank you,

Pamela Noce

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